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ABSTRACT

Because early literacy development occurs through social processes, parents need to be involved in the beginning stages of their children's reading. This thesis details the need for early literacy experiences and provides evidence that reading success begins at home. The thesis distinguishes illiteracy and aliteracy, defines literacy, discusses its importance for successful living, and argues that literacy as taught in school overemphasizes drill and practice at the expense of interesting and valuable literature. In addition, the thesis discusses the interrelationship of literacy skills, describes the components of reading success and the importance of positive reading attitudes, and discusses influences on reading success. The development of early literacy skills is examined, focusing on children's ability to learn, the importance of reading to infants, and linking interests with literacy. Parents' role in children's emerging literacy is highlighted, noting the importance of parental attitudes toward reading and the influence of parental modeling. Other topics discussed in this literature review include selection of age appropriate books, second language learners and literacy, media and technology, and a Christian perspective to early literacy. The thesis concludes by asserting that the home is the single most significant reading environment for children and that it is imperative that parents expose children to quality literature at an early age. Five appendices include descriptions of family literacy activities, handouts for parents, and lists of recommended books. Contains 32 references. (KB)

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M.A. Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of Education

Biola University

La Mirada, California

USA

By

Sheri Ann Ryan

Fall 2000

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A Thesis

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the Faculty of the Department of Education

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

THE VALUE OF EARLY LITERACY AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Sheri Ann Ryan

Children are not born successful readers and writers. Somewhere along the way, the desire to read and write was encouraged by a teacher, parent, or older sibling who demonstrated a love for books. The enthusiasm of others toward reading and writing can be contagious. The difficulty is that sometimes children catch the reading "bug" and other times they do not. Research indicates that learning to read at a young age is vital to a child's future academic achievement (Bettelheim & Zelan, 1981; Hannon, 1995; McLane & McNamee, 1990). Children learn that books can be a source of pleasure, as well as information, by observing their parents modeling literacy in the home (Hunt, 1978; Lindskoog & Lindskoog, 1978; Stoodt, 1981). Children are capable learners and this learning process begins at birth. Parents are their child's first and most significant teacher. Their attitude toward reading is a crucial influence. Their attitude may either encourage or discourage their child to read. Children learn about reading by encountering print in their home environment, as well as observing literacy activities in the home (Clinard, 1991; Krashen, 1993). Parents can help their child learn to read by taking an active role in their learning and by modeling literate behavior. This literature review will describe the desperate need for early literacy and research will prove that reading success begins in the home.

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Illiteracy Versus Aliteracy 2

What Is Literacy? 5

The Importance of Literacy 7

Negative Views on Literacy Skills Taught in School 8

Language Development 10

Ingredients for Reading Success 12

The Love of Reading 13

Influences on Reading Success 16

Early Literacy 18

a. The Importance of Early Literacy 18

b. A Child's Ability to Learn 21

c. Reading to Infants 23

d. Linking Interest with Literacy 27

Parental Involvement 29

a. The Importance of Parental Involvement 29

b. The History of Parental Involvement 32

c. The Parent's Role 36

d. Parental Attitude and Influence 38

e. What Can Parents Do? 41

The Value of Books 46

Age Appropriate Books 48

Second Language Learners and Literacy 50

The Media and Technology Issue 51

A Christian Perspective 53

Conclusion 56

References 59

Appendix A 62

*What Can Parents Do? 63

*Age Appropriate Activities For Reading 64

Appendix B 65

*Literacy Activities at Home 66

*Literacy Activities in the Car 70

Appendix C 72

*Encouraging Summer Reading 73

*Factors That Influence Reading Interest 74

*Word Endings 75

Appendix D 76

*Recommended Books 77

Appendix E 81

* "Unity" poem 82

You may have tangible wealth untold:
Caskets of jewels and coffers of gold.
Richer than I you can never be -
I had a Mother who read to me.
~Strickland Gillilan

Introduction

Growing up in this multilingual, multicultural, multifaceted world is not an easy accomplishment. The demands for job placement, financial success, and social status seem impossible to achieve. Much is expected of adults who want to climb the ladder of success and reach their dreams. Of the many requirements for attaining success, the number one prerequisite is literacy. Literacy skills are necessary in filling out applications, attending interviews, meeting the demands of the workplace and for maintaining a good career. Very few employers will hire people who are unable to read and write. Therefore, to be a productive member of society, one must first be able to read.

Yet, is future success the only reason to attain literacy skills? Research shows that "what is required for a child to be eager to learn to read is not knowledge about reading's practical usefulness, but a fervent belief that being able to read will open him to a world of wonderful experiences, permit him to shed his ignorance, understand the world, and become master of his fate" (Bettelheim & Zelan, 1981, p. 49). Children, as well as adults, need to see literacy in terms of pleasure and significance. A love for reading just for the sake of reading itself should be the primary goal.

Therefore, children should discover a love for reading at an early age. The earlier a child reads, the stronger his love for reading will grow as he becomes an adult. What better place for a child to begin his literacy journey than at home? Parents play a

significant role in helping to foster a love of learning within their children. Bettelheim and Zelan (1981) assert the following:

> The child who enjoys being read to learns to love books. Impressed by his parents' interest in reading and their enjoyment of reading to him, the child studies with keen interest the stories that fascinate him. All on his own, then, he begins to pick out words and learns to recognize them with his parents' help or that of an older sibling. In this way, the child teaches himself to read. (p. 8-9)

Why do some people read and others do not? Why are some people able to use reading as a source of pleasure or information in their lives, while for others, reading is only a source of frustration? Is reading truly important in everyday life? How early should books be introduced to children? How can parents help their children to become lifelong readers? Is it imperative that children begin to discover a love for reading at an early age? In a world where even bumper stickers say such things as, "If you can read this, thank a teacher," it is obvious that reading is the key to success. However, not only should people be thanking teachers for helping them learn to read, but parents as well. This thesis will reveal answers to these questions, and will explicate that early literacy is the key to future reading success.

Illiteracy Versus Aliteracy

The statistics regarding literacy in our country are staggering. Reports of shocking problems with illiteracy not only in the United States, but other countries as well, are numerous. Frequent reports from news media state that there must be a greater effort to

lower illiteracy levels in the United States. Millions of dollars have been invested in order to increase literacy skills. Yet, the results of these efforts are gradual.

A National Adult Literacy Survey conducted in 1993 stated that "about 90 million Americans (55% of the adult population) are functionally illiterate" (p. 1). This same survey also stated that "four out of ten job applicants tested in 1992 for basic reading and/or math skills lacked the mastery necessary for the jobs they sought" (p. 1). Many people in the United States are recent immigrants from other countries. There are many immigrants who are unable to read and write in English, as well as in their own language. This contributes to the illiteracy dilemma. Another research study showed that "a level of illiteracy characterized over 18 million people . . . one out of every four students nationwide has significant reading problems" (Stoodt, 1981, p. 13). These results prove that something must be done to increase the literacy skills of our nation's children.

However, do these results mean that millions of people are completely *illiterate*, or is this really a question of *aliteracy*? One author states that "*aliteracy* has been defined as a 'lack of reading habit; especially, such a lack in capable readers who choose not to read' . . . aliteracy may be a greater problem than illiteracy. While illiteracy is, without question, a very serious concern, aliteracy may be an even greater one" (Harris & Hodges, 1981, p. 11). Therefore the real problem may concern a child's desire and outlook on reading itself, rather than an actual inability to read. Research indicates that there are actually very few people who are completely illiterate. This means that not many people who have attended school, are, in fact, unable to read and write at all. "There is, however, a

problem. Nearly everyone in the United States can read and write. They just don't read and write very well" (Krashen, 1993, p. x).

If the root of the literacy problem is based upon the idea that people who are able to read simply choose not to, then getting children and adults to *want* to read is the ideal. In Stephen Krashen's opinion (1993), "the cure for this kind of literacy crisis lies in doing one activity, an activity that is all too often rare in the lives of many people: reading" (p. x). He recommends that people use free voluntary reading, or FVR. "FVR means reading because you want to . . . FVR means putting down a book you don't like and choosing another one instead. It is the kind of reading highly literate people do obsessively all the time" (Krashen, 1993, p. x). Is FVR enough to solve the literacy crisis? Krashen (1993) explains that "FVR will not, by itself, produce the highest levels of competence; rather, it provides a foundation so that higher levels of proficiency may be reached. When FVR is missing, these advanced levels are extremely difficult to attain" (p. 1). Therefore, it can be assumed that reading is very important, but ultimately, there are other factors to consider in order to raise a nation of readers. This fact is also seen in the following seemingly implausible statement by Thomas and Loring (1979):

> Several years ago, someone told me that two-thirds of our nation's population had read its last book by age eighteen. While I've never run across that statistic again, I've worked with adolescents long enough to believe that it's true. And other figures have come rushing. Surveys by the National Opinion Research Center show that: (1) citizens of the United States read fewer books than citizens of

> Great Britain, France, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, and the Scandinavian countries; (2) approximately 10 percent of our population reads approximately 80 percent of the books read; (3) about half the adult population of the US has never read a book all the way through; (4) less than one out of five adults could name a book they would like to read. (p.128)

This research demonstrates the enormity of the literacy crisis.

What Is Literacy?

What then is literacy? Many educators have differing opinions on how to define this word. Often, literacy is viewed as the ability to read and write, in essence, the knowledge of letters and sounds and how people express themselves. However, most authors, as well as educators, will agree that literacy is much more involved than simply reading and writing. "Literacy is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon" (McLane & McNamee, 1990, p. 2).

Literacy is made up of many different components. In her workbook, Linda Clinard (1997) states that literacy is "the ability to use thinking, speaking, listening, reading, and writing to solve problems; complete tasks; and communicate wants, needs, feelings, and ideas" (p. 3). Therefore, there are many areas that contribute to a child's success in literacy. McLane and McNamee explain:

> Reading is defined as the ability to 'take meaning from print,' and writing as the ability to use print to communicate with others. According to these definitions, reading and writing are more than simply decoding and encoding print: they are

> ways of constructing and conveying meaning with written language...In our view, literacy is both an individual intellectual achievement and a form of cultural knowledge that enables people to participate in a range of groups and activities that in some way involve writing and reading. It is closely tied to specific social and cultural contexts and activities. (p. 2-3)

In understanding how literacy develops, one must research the environment in which children learn and grow. The degree in which a child has been involved with books and writing tools is determined by his background experiences. Even parents who are unable to read can provide literacy opportunities (see Appendix B). Any educator or parent who is involved in helping children become better readers, needs to address these areas.

Furthermore, not all children learn to read and write at the same pace or with the same ease as others. Therefore, it is important to look at these differences and realize that children need to explore all types of methods to encourage them to read successfully. One author calls this the idea of "multiple literacies" and goes on to state that "the notion of multiple literacies recognizes that there are many ways of being-and becoming-literate, and that how literacy develops and how it is used depend on the particular social and cultural setting. Literacy is a social and cultural achievement, as well as a cognitive one" (McLane & McNamee, 1990, p. 3).

A child's home environment is a strong contributing factor to reading success. Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson (1985) provide this excellent analogy:

> Reading can be compared to the performance of a symphony orchestra. This analogy illustrates three points. First, like the performance of a symphony, reading is a holistic act. In other words, while reading can be analyzed into subskills such as discriminating letters and identifying words, performing the subskills one at a time does not constitute reading. Reading can be said to take place only when the parts are put together in a smooth integrated performance. Second, success in reading comes from practice over long periods of time, like skill in playing musical instruments. Indeed, it is a lifelong endeavor. Third, as with a musical score, there may be more than one interpretation of a text. The interpretation depends upon the background of the reader, the purpose for reading, and the context in which reading occurs. (p. 7)

This research demonstrates that a child's attitude, background experience, home life, parental influence, social influences, and time all play a part in achieving success in literacy.

The Importance of Literacy

Undeniably, literacy is necessary in our society. As was previously mentioned, literacy is essential for success in life. "Today, there is widespread anxiety about literacy in almost all countries throughout the world. In those where large sections of the population are illiterate, universal literacy is seen as essential for reaching political, economic and health goals" (Hannon, 1995, p. 1). Even though success is not the primary goal in developing literate individuals, the fact remains that our world revolves around economics,

politics, and social status. The emulation, especially in the United States, for excellent, high paying jobs is increasing every year. The competition in this emerging global economy is becoming more fierce, and those who work in it will need to be educated and literate individuals in order to survive.

Negative Views on Literacy Skills Taught in School

Due to the results of the research provided, questions may arise as to whether schools are teaching children with suitable techniques and materials to help them become successful readers. There are many controversies centralized around this issue. A school is an establishment for teaching and learning. The necessity for children to attend school is undeniable. Skills taught in school prepare children for the future and equip them with the aptitude necessary to survive in the community and in today's society. Yet there is much debate about the process in which educators instruct students in the area of reading.

Many publishers of reading programs have attempted to promote balanced literacy curriculum. However, the results have proven to be less than successful in some cases. Much emphasis continues to be placed upon drill and practice instead of interesting and valuable literature. "If, rather than concentrating on developing reading skills, educational efforts from the very beginning were concentrated on developing the desire to become literate - essentially, an inner attitude to reading - then the final result might be that a much larger segment of the adult population would be literate" (Bettelheim & Zelan, 1981, p. 21). Drill and practice can erode the zeal to read and cause apathy toward literature. Bettelheim and Zelan (1981) assert that "one major difference between the children who

teach themselves to read at home and those who learn it only in school is that the first group learn to read from texts that fascinate them, while the second learn to read by being drilled in skills of decoding and word recognition from texts devoid of meaningful content that are demeaning to the child's intelligence" (p. 9-10).

Numerous books can be found in schools that contain simple word family stories. These stories can be useful in helping a child to see similarities between words and helping with phonics and decoding skills. Yet, these books lack any real sustenance. "A child who is made to read: 'Nan had a pad. Nan had a tan pad. Dan ran. Dan ran to the pad . . . ' and worse nonsense, does not receive the impression that he is being guided toward becoming literate, because what he is being made to read is obviously not literature" (Bettelheim & Zelan, 1981, p. 6-7).

Many excellent authors have written exceptionally rich literature that is easily read by children. Why must literature be watered down for the sake of early readers? Children are motivated by interest. When books are void of exciting ideas and stories with appeal, children lack any desire to read. Yet, when given the opportunity to choose their own stories, children will be more vigorous with learning to read because they will want to decipher the meaning of the text.

Children are often given the opportunity within their homes to make choices about their reading selections. Often, it is this reason that children have learned to love reading. Bettelheim and Zelan (1981) propose that "it is not methods of learning in school that turned them [children] into good readers and eventually literate persons; one is tempted to

say that these are attitudes which these children acquired and maintained despite the experiences to which they have been exposed in school" (p. 9).

Language Development

As previously mentioned, literacy is not just about reading skills. Listening, speaking, reading and writing skills are all integrated in the concept of literacy. A child's first step towards literacy begins with language. From infancy on, a baby is surrounded by language. Even though an infant can not speak, he is listening and learning.

From listening comes speaking, and through both come reading and writing. These four skills build upon each other. Linda Clinard (1981) comments that, "first we must realize that reading cannot be isolated from the rest of a child's language experiences" (p. 1). In fact, language skills appear to be one of the most significant literacy skills. "Language is, indeed, in the center of the stage as far as learning and intelligence are concerned . . . the other outstanding conclusion of scientists that relates to our present purpose is that language stands head and shoulders over all other tools as an instrument of learning" (Butler, 1980, p. 3).

If this data is true, then children need to be exposed to language experiences early on. Parents need to surround their children with dialogue. Often parents neglect to talk to their children about every day activities because they believe that their children are too young to understand. Babies will not completely understand everything that is said to them, yet by listening to spoken language, these infants are beginning to develop skills that will build a foundation for later learning. Singing and chanting nursery rhymes also

introduce a child to language. The ability to utilize language well is one of the most important skills a parent can cultivate in his/her child.

Therefore, reading and language go hand in hand. Clinard (1981) comments on this idea in what she calls 'The Language Triangle.' The aspects are, "(1) Gaining information by listening and reading, (2) understanding what has been heard and read, and (3) communicating our understanding by what we say and do" (p. 2). Consequently, parents should be compelled to converse with their children about things around them. Parents ought to let their children experience every aspect of their world. "Whenever possible, encourage your child to see, touch, smell, taste as you explain what is being experienced" (Clinard, 1981, p. 10). Infants and toddlers are amazed and curious about everything that goes on around them. Parents should be encouraged to clarify each event. Even little things such as leaves blowing in the wind, a ball bouncing, men sawing, and cars honking are important occurrences to discuss.

Toddlers can also begin to comment on what they have seen or heard. Parents need to encourage their children to discuss their experiences. "Another way to provide experience with language is by asking the child to talk about things he has seen" (Larrick, 1959, p. 5). Even one or two word responses, such as "doggy," a "leaf," or "birdie" are significant steps toward language development and understanding. These experiences with language are the foundational building blocks that children need in order to help them comprehend stories that are introduced to them. A story about a turtle will have much more meaning for a child who has actually encountered one.

Ingredients for Reading Success

Understanding that literacy means learning to listen, speak, read, and write is just the beginning. Where does one go from there? One must realize what helps make a good reader. "Successful readers approach printed material with (1) **P**urpose, (2) **U**nderstanding, (3) good **R**ecall, and (4) **E**njoyment - **PURE** Reading" (Clinard, 1981, p. 17).

Finding a purpose for reading is the first essential ingredient for reading success. As mentioned previously, books that have no appeal ('Nan had a pad.') will cause children to dislike reading. They need to understand that books can open up worlds for them that they may not otherwise be able to explore. They can read about countries they would love to visit, or animals that intrigue them, or people they admire. If they have a question about something, books can help them find the answer. Children must see a purpose for reading or they will lose interest quickly.

The second ingredient is understanding. A child must not only understand how to read, but he must also understand what he is reading. Background experiences play a large role in understanding texts that are read. It is important for parents to provide a multitude of experiences for their children. These include the use of language and the five senses. Seeing, tasting, touching, smelling, and hearing all aid a child in understanding his environment and the world around him. The prior knowledge that a child brings to the text will aid him in his comprehension. A child who has spent a day at the zoo will be much more receptive about an animal book and will often have greater recall.

Consequently, good recall is also necessary for success. Parents can assist in this area as well. Discussing what the child has read allows him to retain the information. It is not enough to read and understand. The child must also be able to retell or give back information about the text. However, the dialogue must remain fun and enjoyable or the child will lose interest. "What is read with delight is commonly retained, because pleasure always secures attention, but the books which are consulted by...necessity and perused with impatience seldom leave any traces on the mind" (Cramer & Castle, 1994, p. 143).

Most important of the four ingredients for reading success is enjoyment. Children should learn to love reading. Reading should be fun and exciting. Drilling children on every word will deflate their interest. Making reading time enjoyable will build a love for books that will continue throughout their lives.

The Love of Reading

"It is widely accepted that a positive attitude toward reading is important for achievement in reading. Even though to date there is relatively little empirical evidence to support such a contention, few practitioners or researchers would deny that attitude plays a central part in becoming literate" (Thomas & Loring, 1983, p. 3). Since 1983, more research has proven that there is indeed a direct correlation between reading success and a positive attitude. However, not many would refute this correlation despite the new data. If children do not enjoy what they are doing, they do not continue. This is true of any event or activity. This is also true for adults. Why continue playing golf if you are not good at it or dislike it? There is no reason. A person would simply find another activity

which is more pleasurable. Children who dislike reading would probably rather play soccer or watch television than sit for hours with a book. Yet, reading is much more essential to life than a game of golf or a television program. Therefore, instilling a love for reading is also essential to life.

Teachers, as well as parents, need to approach reading in an interesting way. If a child is bored, he will not learn. "If taught in a boring way, any subject becomes uninteresting, and the results of teaching it painfully meager" (Bettelheim & Zelan, 1981, p. 32). How many people in this world detest history because it was taught in a boring way? Those same people probably would enjoy the movie "All Quiet on the Western Front" because the media brought the story alive. The idea is the same with reading. Reading is exciting and children need to see it as such. Reading for young children should be entertaining. "That is why the emphasis on the technical aspects of learning to read, which characterizes the teaching methods used at present in this country, is detrimental and often actually destructive to the child's ability to enjoy reading and literature" (Bettelheim & Zelan, 1981, p. 8).

The attitude a child has towards reading relates not only to his achievement, but also to the characteristics of that child as a reader. "If we teach a child to read, yet develop not the taste for reading, all of our teaching is for naught. We shall have produced a nation of 'illiterate literates' - those who know how to read but do not read" (Huck, 1973, p. 305). Reading needs to become an integral part of a child's life. "Children must come to see reading as something they do, rather than as a task imposed

on them . . . then may reading become for them the great pleasure of their lives, and may what we do become worth the difficult job it is" (Thomas & Loring, 1979, p. 12).

Fostering a love for learning in children necessitates teamwork between the teacher and the parents. The teacher is professionally trained to teach children how to read, but the parent provides a warm environment for reading and helps build upon the child's interests. The parent's job is equally and vitally important. Some parents believe that teaching reading is the job of the teacher alone. "Certainly she is the expert and her work is vitally important. But the skill-building part of the reading program is only one aspect of the whole. The interest-building part is equally important. In fact, the two are really inseparable. For reading skills increase with reading pleasure" (Larrick, 1959, p. 1).

A love for reading leads to a love for learning. Parents are essential in this process. They provide much more than a teacher can. According to Gladys Hunt (1978):

> Few things are more important for a child than to discover the joy of reading. Give him a love of reading, and you have given him not only the most satisfying and useful of all recreations but also the key to true learning. The home is still the greatest educational force, and parents who make reading attractive contribute immeasurably to their children's intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development. (p. 9)

The desire is to foster a love of reading that becomes tightly woven into everyday life. Young readers need to grow into adult readers. Reading is a lifelong process and should be a lifelong desire.

Children who love to read possess a positive outlook when they think of books. They realize the significance and value of reading and they want to learn more. Bettelheim & Zelan (1981) explain:

> If the child did not know it before, it will soon be impressed on him that of all school learning, nothing compares in importance with reading; it is of unparalleled significance. This is why how it is taught is so important: the way in which learning to read is experienced by the child will determine how he will view learning in general, how he will conceive of himself as a learner and even as a person. (p. 5)

This self-conception is first and foremost developed in the home. Parents build the foundation for learning and help build self-esteem within their children. When children have a strong reading foundation, they tend to become successful readers. "Children who acquire a great interest in reading in their homes have an easy time reading in school, and they form the overwhelming majority of those who later become the good readers" (Bettelheim & Zelan, 1981, p. 9).

Influences on Reading Success

Clinard (1981) states that there are "four areas which influence all of learning - especially language and reading: (1) physical characteristics; (2) attitude and behavior; (3) home and social environment; and (4) educational background" (p. 25). These areas build upon one another and are important factors. All four issues are interwoven and significant for attaining success in literacy.

Physical characteristics include any physical capabilities that may enhance or detract from learning. Learning disabilities are accounted for in this area. A high IQ would also be an instrumental physical characteristic. If any negative physical characteristics are observed, they should be attended to early on. Early intervention of learning difficulties is the key to helping children get on the right track as soon as possible. Two common problems areas are vision and hearing. "A variety of physical characteristics will influence learning but hearing and vision are most closely related to reading and language development" (Clinard, 1981, p. 25). Fortunately, schools do frequent screenings in these areas so that obstacles can be removed early on.

Attitude and behavior also play an important role in the way a child learns. As has been previously mentioned, a positive attitude toward reading can produce better results, whereas a negative attitude can be detrimental to a child's ability to learn. In addition to attitude, a child's behavior can tell a great deal about how a child is learning. Behavior affects attitude. If a child is restless or easily distracted, then his interest level is low. On the other hand, if a child is attentive and eager, he will be more receptive to learning how to read.

The home environment and social environment are key areas to discuss. These ideas will be covered in greater detail throughout this thesis. It is vitally important that a child sees literacy as a valuable and essential skill. If he sees his family and community members reading, and is shown at a young age that reading is essential, he will be more apt to read.

Obviously educational background has a large influence on learning success. If one has never been taught, then how can one learn? The more education one has, the more he knows. This does not simply include institutionalized education. People learn something new everyday from the world around them. Babies learn how to do more things in their first year of life than they do in the next five years combined. In those few years, children learn how to respond to stimuli, recognize familiar faces, babble, crawl, walk, talk, and begin to decipher right from wrong. These developments occur through observing those around them.

Children also learn from experience and from others' instructions. Parents and teachers alike are instrumental in this educational training. The US Department of Education stated, "The single most important factor influencing a child's early educational success and achievement (first and second grade) is an introduction to books and being read to at home prior to beginning school" (p. 1). Children need both the home and the school environment to achieve greater success. Reading is a cultural, cognitive and social endeavor that permeates every aspect of a child's life. With this in mind, it is imperative that children begin the reading process at an early age.

Early Literacy

The Importance of Early Literacy

"If literacy is a cultural, social, and cognitive achievement, when does its development begin? For some children, learning to write and to read appears to happen spontaneously and 'naturally,' and sometimes well before formal schooling" (McLane &

McNamee, 1990, p. 7). This spontaneous and natural learning begins as an infant and progresses as the child begins to grow. Therefore, most researchers would agree that children are capable of learning a great deal before they enter school (Bettelheim & Zelan, 1981; Hannon, 1995; McLane & McNamee, 1990).

Once again, literacy encompasses much more than simply reading and writing. It is a multifaceted skill that involves abilities, beliefs, attitudes, expectations, and much more. Many of these things are developed in early childhood. McLane and McNamee (1990) conclude:

> One of our major goals is to demonstrate that the development of literacy consists of more than learning skills such as handwriting, decoding, and spelling. Rather, literacy development consists of mastering a complex set of attitudes, expectations, feelings, behaviors, and skills related to written language. This collection of attitudes and skills constitutes what has been called, 'emergent literacy.' There is a growing body of evidence that early - or emergent - literacy often begins well before children go to school and before they master the technical skills involved in writing and reading. (p. 4)

Even though literacy is taught in school, the process is initiated in the home and in community arenas, such as in preschools, daycare environments, and churches (McLane & McNamee, 1990).

Children are not only capable of learning at an young age, but should be valued as able learners. Margaret Meek (1982) suggests:

> Reading is a whole-task learning right from the start. From first to last the child should be invited to behave like a reader, and those who want to help him should assume that he can learn, and will learn, just as happened when he began to talk... Learning to read in the early stages, like everything else a child has come to know, is an approximation of adult behavior with genuine meaningful function. (p. 24)

Children can sense when someone believes in them. When validated as an intelligent person, the child's self-concept will be extremely positive. A parent does not *hope* his perfectly healthy child will one day walk. He *expects* his child to walk. Parents should believe the same thing about learning, especially learning to read.

The pivotal learning years occur in the first eight to nine years of a child's life. All that a child has learned up to this point will direct the way he learns throughout his life. If a child still is unable to read and write by age nine, he will most likely struggle later on. Benjamin Bloom (in Bettelheim & Zelan, 1981) points out that:

> Approximately 50% of general achievement at grade 12 (age 18) has been reached by the end of grade 3 (age 9). This suggests the great importance of the first few years of school as well as the preschool period in the development of learning patterns and general achievement. These are the years in which general learning patterns develop most rapidly, and failure to develop appropriate achievement and learning in these years is likely to lead to continued failure or near failure throughout the remainder of the individual's school career. (p. 13-14)

A Child's Ability to Learn

From the day they are born, babies begin the learning process. Children are sponges and absorb ideas constantly. Observing youngsters in their early years helps in building a foundation where mature literacy can occur. McLane and McNamee (1990) explain:

> For many children, the beginnings of literacy appear in activities such as pretend play, drawing, conversations about storybook plots and characters, and conversations about the words on street signs or the labels of favorite foods. Such activities make it clear that children are actively trying to use - and to understand and make sense of - reading and writing long before they can actually read and write. (p. 4-5)

Therefore, children begin to learn what reading and writing are through playful and fun activities and through their experimentation with language. Even though they are unable to read and write, they can express themselves, and demonstrate their knowledge through other avenues. McLane and McNamee (1990) state:

> Reading involves a less visible, more internal mental process, but young children engage in a range of activities that indicate that they are trying to understand and participate in reading. They act out the role of reader, they include books and pretend reading in their dramatic play, and they include plots and characters from storybooks in their fantasy and pretend play by observing those in their environment, children grasp the importance of literacy. (p. 6)

They learn why people read and what others are doing when they read. They learn that written messages have meaning and that stories can be personally meaningful to them. Parents are often amazed at how much a child is able to learn. When children see the rewards that come from reading, they are usually more motivated to become readers themselves.

Even children who have no desire to read or believe that reading is too difficult for them, can often be turned into readers. Learning vocabulary words is a critical element in learning to read. Children are actually capable of learning and retaining several words a day. This includes difficult as well as 'easy' words. One very striking historical example of this is Helen Keller. Helen was blind, deaf and mute and viciously fought anyone's attempt to teach her to read. At the age of seven, she met Anne Sullivan, who began working with her. It only took a few weeks for Anne Sullivan to teach her to "read," or to distinguish about 400 words that were spelled into her hand. Anne Sullivan once said that she had taught Helen words such as bedstead, mattress, blanket, comforter, and spread in one lesson. The next day, Helen was able to recall all the words except "spread." Helen had also learned words such as raspberry, molasses, counter, house, and weed, all of which she was able to remember (Braddy, 1933). This example is proof that parents should never doubt the capabilities of a child, no matter what the child's situation may be.

Anne Sullivan used words that held specific meaning for Helen. The vocabulary words taught by Anne were those in which Helen experienced in everyday life. The fact

that Helen was familiar with the words and that they held significance for her, played an important role in the ability to learn those words. If Helen had first been taught sentences such as, "Tim did a jig. Can the pig jig?" she may never have learned to read. The words and stories children read should have meaning or relevance to their lives.

Reading to Infants

Even though children are capable of learning to read at an early age, parents often wonder when they should begin reading to their child. Is it ever too early to start? Butler (1980) remarks that the learning process begins from birth:

> From the moment a baby first opens his eyes, he is learning. Sight, sound, and sensation together spark off a learning process which will continue to the end of his life and determine in large measure the sort of person he will become . . . Scientists tell us that approximately one half of a person's ultimate intelligence is developed by the age of four, with another thirty percent accruing by the age of eight. Clearly, what happens during these years matters. (p. 1)

Therefore, talking, reading, playing games, singing, and reciting nursery rhymes with your child, even at infancy, helps lay a foundation for a lifelong interest in books and reading.

Unfortunately, many parents are hesitant to read to their baby due to the reading level of books, or the chance that they may be modeling reading skills that are far beyond the child's ability to comprehend. However, hearing intonations of stories read and looking at vibrant illustrations are excellent stimuli for babies. They love the sound of their parents' voices and enjoy the illustrations and bright colors. Butler (1980) states:

> Even in the world of book production, the notion that babies need books is slow to take root. But why worry if the characters in his books are operating at a level the baby will not reach for several years? This is true of the people around him, who walk, talk, and conduct their lives in complex ways before his sponge-like contemplation. How much could he possibly learn from the boring company of other babies? Babies need people: talking, laughing, warm-hearted people, constantly drawing them into their lives, and offering them the world for a playground. Let's give them books to parallel this experience; books where language and illustration activate the senses, so that meaning slips in smoothly, in the wake of feeling. (p. 13)

Even though books and babies seem like a strange combination, reading aloud to babies lays a wonderful foundation for language learning and success in school. Reading with a parent gives the infant or toddler close personal attention from someone he loves. This helps build the child's self-esteem and confidence.

There are many significant reasons for reading to a baby. Reading to a child can stretch a child's mind, develop language skills, and help build critical thinking skills. When a parent reads to his child, the child begins to expect books to be a part of his life. Books will be as important to the child as food and clothing. Books will become a source of pleasure and entertainment for the child. As he hears the language spoken in the stories, he may try to imitate it. He will learn vocabulary and names for things around him. Most importantly, the child will feel the parent's love and begin to associate that love with

reading. Being able to read to a child is a gift. As a parent reads and discusses books with her child, she helps create opportunities for future success.

It is essential that books be placed in areas where young children can look at them whenever they desire. A parent may not always be available to read to their child, but books should always be available. Children love turning pages and pointing to things that excite them in the illustrations. Parents should teach their children how to handle books. Even toddlers can learn how to be gentle. Many parents are too concerned that their children will destroy the books, so they place them on high shelves, out of the child's reach. This is unfortunate. Butler (1980) speaks to parents about this idea as he explains:

> If you feel like this, try making a connection in your mind between books and food. All parents know that children need nourishing food if their bodies are to grow lithe and healthy. They also know that older babies and toddlers must start to learn to feed themselves and that this will certainly lead to messiness, waste of food, and even damage to property. Nonetheless, they allow the child to learn; to embark on the bumbling practice, which will lead to that dexterity with knife, fork and spoon that our society expects and demands. Books are as essential a food for the developing mind as cereal, fruit and vegetables are for the growing body. In an environment where books are valued and used, competence is achieved early. (p. 35-36)

If parents look at their own bookshelves, they will most likely find books from their own childhood that have managed to survive their younger days. They may be

frayed a bit around the edges, but the story still holds much enjoyment for their own children. Books are the gifts with which people rarely part. Many people discover that years after the bicycles, toy trucks, and teddy bears are gone, there are Mike Mulligan, Curious George, and Mother Goose remaining on the shelf, ready for future children and grandchildren to read.

As babies become toddlers, the reading experience becomes even more valuable. Now they are able to really comprehend some concepts in the stories. They understand expressions of happiness or sadness in the book and in some cases, they can relate more with the characters. Two year olds are very curious and desire to experience everything they possibly can. Books offer parents and children a quiet, peaceful time with each other.

Young toddlers need even more experiences now with the world around them. Parents need to provide opportunities for young children to encounter the ideas and activities they see in the books they read. Between the ages of two and four, the world becomes a new and exciting place for a child. Before this time, the child was curious about his immediate surroundings of his home and neighborhood. Yet at this new toddler age, he now desires to explore the world and learn about everything.

Toddlers also have favorite books that they love to hear over and over again. They begin to memorize the text or they even make up their own version of the story. Clinard (1981) comments that "such first attempts at reading in books should not be discouraged. Knowing words from memory and recognizing that words should fit the meaning of the pictures on a page are important tools for future reading success" (p. 22).

The child is motivated and excited about reading. The idea of reading now holds much more meaning to him. "He is now able to follow a simple story through a book, and involve himself with the characters. At two he will still love his 'old' books - repetition is going to be savored for a long time yet - but will need new and different stories constantly" (Butler, 1980, p. 62). Having contact with books allows a child to develop good vocabulary skills, to build his imagination, and to experience a variety of emotions. "If this experience is offered him, as a normal human right in childhood, he will expect repetition of it to the end of his life and make sure that it is always available. In other words, he will become a reader" (Butler, 1980, p. 67).

Linking Interest with Literacy

One way to ensure that a child will learn to love reading is to be certain that any book a child is asked to read is one that he wants to read. A child's interest level affects his level of motivation. If parents and teachers are aware of what piques a child's interests, they will be able to locate books that will attract him and excite him just as much as his hobbies. "The discovery of a students' interests is an essential first step in the motivation process" (Thomas & Loring, 1979, p. 49).

Mary Leonhardt (1996) offers many suggestions for hooks that will motivate children to continue reading. The first idea is to furnish books for children with which they are able to identify. "I think this is the universal hook. If we can find books that seem to capture and illuminate the individual experiences of our children, they will be pulled forever into reading as a way of understanding their world" (Leonhardt, 1996, p.

124). Locking onto a child's hobbies, talents, and interests is an important motivational key.

A second suggestion is to look for "wish" books. All children have dreams of what they would like to become or things they would love to experience. There is no harm in dreaming. Books can help those dreams come alive for children. "Wishing to be an astronaut or military test pilot - or a brave warrior who can slay dragons - might help children to raise their sights in life" (Leonhardt, 1996, p. 128).

Another way to reel students into the idea of reading is to look for special-interest reading materials. Some examples would be sports, horses, fantasy, science fiction, magic, horror, war, mysteries, romance, etc. Introducing children to a variety of literature helps pique their interest. "Special-interest reading is an incredibly effective way to build a love and a habit of reading" (Leonhardt, 1996, p. 131).

A fourth suggestion is to familiarize children with stories that are comic. Most people love a good laugh and enjoy stories that bring humor into their lives. Humor makes reading more enjoyable and fun for children of all ages. In Leonhardt's (1996) opinion, "all children love funny stories, probably because funny stories are usually happy stories . . . it is often a comic novel that finally pulls in that kid I thought I was never going to get reading" (p. 138-139).

Parents are the most valuable asset in realizing a child's interests. They are with their children every day. They observe them in play, in conversation and in interactions with others. Finding out what interests their children is an easier task for parents. They

can offer an array of books that will excite their children. Children get their roots in literacy from their parents. They learn to see print as part of their environment, they see that written words contain meaning, and they learn to express their thoughts about stories. "It is clear that children's reading must grow from roots such as these and it is clear that these roots are nourished mainly in the home environment" (Hannon, 1995, p. 40).

Parental Involvement

The Importance of Parental Involvement

Since literacy is a cultural and cognitive accomplishment, then it is evident that it also is acquired naturally through daily experiences and through the child's environment. Consequently, literacy is a social achievement as well. The people that children are surrounded by serve as models in the literacy process. Many researchers agree that much of what children learn is learned at home. Hunt (1978) defines "home" as:

> A safe place, a place where one is free from attack, a place where one experiences secure relationships and affirmation. It's a place where people share and understand each other. It's relationships are nurturing. The people in it do not need to be perfect; instead, they need to be honest, loving, supportive, recognizing a common humanity that makes all of us vulnerable. (p. 104)

Children who are successful readers often come from homes that have several characteristics. Some of these characteristics include: stability, parents and children openly communicating, children daily observing their parents reading, reading materials openly available to children, every member of the family valuing reading, a family that

provides many opportunities for experiences outside of the home, and children who are well-fed and healthy (Stoodt, 1981).

Parents play a vital role in the growth of their children in all areas, including their emotional, physical, spiritual, and intellectual development. What parents do for their children on a daily basis must not be taken for granted. Stoodt (1981) contends that:

> The influence of family life on children's levels of reading achievement cannot be underestimated. Parents contribute greatly to the language, emotional, and physical development of children. Parents who spend time talking with their children are encouraging language development. Love, patience, and understanding foster a sense of security that is the groundwork upon which successful learning can occur. (p. 39)

Therefore, parents need to realize the importance of their involvement in the literacy development process. They can aid in ensuring that reading is enjoyable for their children instead of a problem. This is true whether the child is already in school or still in diapers. Children are more likely to enjoy reading and writing if they observe it within the home. "The child who is exposed naturally, as part of a happy home life, to the best work of good writers, is fortunate indeed" (Lindskoog & Lindskoog, 1978, p. 21).

Research offers proof that children whose parents spend time reading to and with them in the home do better in school than those whose parents do not read to them. There are many reasons for this. Children are inclined to pick up information at home from books that often give them a head start in school. Moreover, reading to children at

home increases their vocabulary and allows them more opportunities to succeed in the classroom. Furthermore, reading to children at home provides excellent opportunities to build their critical thinking skills. McLane and McNamee (1990) expand upon this idea when they state:

> Children learn about reading and learn how to read from encountering print in their environment and from participating in reading activities with more competent readers. Adults often point out print to children and help them notice a particular configuration of letters such as the spelling of their name or road signs indicating the city where they live . . . children also learn a great deal about print, as well as about the process of reading, from having books read to them. From these various experiences, children learn about reading as a process of communication and as a process of interpreting the world. (p. 65)

The final thought about involving parents in the literacy process is most important. Parents love their children. Parents are readily available for their children no matter what happens in their lives. They may struggle to read or succeed rapidly. A parent loves unconditionally, and will encourage or to comfort when trials come. No amount of teaching in school can compare to the power of a parent's love. Loving parents help develop literate children. Hannon (1995) comments:

> The word "love" does not figure prominently in the vocabulary of educational researchers but it refers to something fundamental. Most parents find involvement in their child's development, whether in literacy or other areas,

> *intrinsically* rewarding and fulfilling. This, after all, is one reason why they became parents. Two implications follow. First, parents are a highly motivated teaching force and schools should not allow their potential to be wasted. Second, one does not really need to justify parental involvement in any other terms. It is not just a means to an end; it is already an end - a good - in itself. (p. 50)

The History of Parental Involvement

Even though, in this present day, most teachers do value the assistance that parents can give their children, history shows that this was not always the case. Prior to the 1970's, parents were often excluded from reading instruction. They were not allowed to help teachers or students in the classroom setting and they were not encouraged to work with their children at home. One reason for this was that teachers viewed parental involvement as simply one more thing to do in their already busy schedule. Planning for parent volunteers or providing material for parents to use in the home was too time consuming.

"Another reason for parental exclusion is the professionalization of the teaching of literacy, particularly reading . . . [Some teachers thought] that those who know even less about reading, particularly parents, are not competent to teach it" (Hannon, 1995, p. 19). Some teachers believed that since they had received years of training and most parents had not, then those parents were unqualified to teach their children. "Some teachers fear that if parents become involved they would do more harm than good and that it is safer, in the interests of the children, to distance them from the teaching of literacy" (Hannon, 1995,

p. 35). Yet, no research evidence exists to prove this theory. Though the efforts of some parents may possibly have had counter-productive results, the majority of parents provide positive results. Negative results may have come from parents not being advised what to do with their child, or the possibility that they have low literacy skills themselves. Yet, no matter what the literacy level of the parents, they can still talk about stories that their children read as well as provide a multitude of literacy experiences.

Even parents feared that working with their children would have an adverse affect on their child's learning. When asked about working with her preschool age child in literacy, one parent (in Hannon, 1995) stated:

> A lot of parents don't do things with their kids because they don't want to do it wrong. If the way that you do it is different to what they do at school they're going to have to do it again. It would be best if they told us the right way before they started. When you come out of the hospital if they just gave you a book about it because you're teaching them from being right little, aren't you, from being born really. (p. 61)

Most parents wish there was an instruction book that would answer every question they may have regarding their children. Unfortunately, no such book exists. However, teachers need to work with parents by giving them ideas for literacy activities that the parents can do at home to enhance learning.

Herbert Kohl (1974) argues that, "Anyone who reads with a certain degree of competency can help others who read less well. This is the case regardless of age or

previous educational training. However, most people in this culture are not accustomed to thinking of themselves as teachers" (p. 12). Parents are a child's first teachers. If parents believe in themselves and believe in their value as educators, they can raise children who are readers.

In the 1970's there was a trend toward somewhat limited involvement for parents. The turning point for parents was the publication of the Plowden Report in England. This report made several recommendations. It stated that Parent Teacher Associations should be developed, parents should be free to choose the schools their children attend, teachers should do home visits, and parents should be contacted by the teacher more often (Hannon, 1995). However, Hannon (1995) explains that this provided only "limited" involvement because:

> Most [parents] were not free to spend time in school during the day and, additionally, numbers were limited by space and the amount of time teachers could give to supporting and guiding parents. Second, parents were usually limited to the margins of the curriculum - washing paint pots rather than teaching math - since teachers not unreasonably considered parents had not been trained for teaching, especially teaching children other than their own in groups. Third, parents had the most limited influence on the curriculum itself, which, at that time, continued to be defined, planned and implemented by teachers. Fourth, the impact of parents was limited because their unique advantages over teachers as educators of their own children in their own homes

> were not exploited. Instead, they were invited to work in the alien territory of the school - a less meaningful environment than the home for many - with children other than their own. (p. 21)

From the 1980's on, parents became increasingly more involved in their children's education. "Parental involvement in the teaching of reading changed in two ways . . . from allowing parents only an indirect role to allowing them a direct one, and from being school-focused to being home-focused" (Hannon, 1995, p. 25). Schools became more willing to allow students to take books home. Teachers began to give parents support and encouraged them to read books to their children at home, especially books that were being read to them in the classroom.

Parents were also strongly encouraged to listen to their children read every day. Hearing children read was regarded as vitally important in the 1980's after research by Jenny Hewison and Jack Tizard was published. Their research showed that "an important factor in working-class children's reading attainment at age seven was whether their parents had heard them read regularly in the early school years" (Hannon, 1995, p. 23). This research led to even more significant research called the Haringey Project. A group of researchers conducted a series of home visits in which they requested that all the parents listen to their children read the books that they brought home from school. "The research showed that, after two years, these children had better reading test scores than comparable children whose parents had not been involved in this way in the teaching of reading" (Hannon, 1995, p. 23).

Therefore, history outlines an era of discernment. Though parents were once considered incapable of being teachers at home, they are now considered integral team players in the literacy arena. Cashdan (1986) states:

> Whereas in the past teachers held on to the professionalism of hearing children read as their specialist preserve, they have now realized that perhaps their professionalism lies elsewhere . . . parents have in some cases been asked to take over the practice of hearing their children read almost exclusively, either at home or in school . . . it has had the bonus of freeing teachers to concentrate on functional reading. The partnership has been almost entirely fruitful. (p. 124)

The Parents' Role

If parents are to be part of the learning process, then their roles must be clearly defined. First, and foremost, parents serve as role models for their children. Parents who find pleasure in reading and promote it as a daily activity in the home, conduct themselves as role models and generate an environment in which children will willingly spend time reading. Children tend to read more when they observe others reading. This includes the home and school environment. Parents need to be models of literate behavior. Children want to please their parents and will try to act as their parents do. "Young children pay close attention to what they see the powerful and significant people in their world doing, and they imitate behaviors that seem to be important to these people" (McLane & McNamee, 1990, p. 90). Clinard (1981) contends that "the only way children will sense the need to read is by seeing those around them reading" (p. 18).

The parental role in literacy development is multifaceted. A parent is a director. She is responsible for making each reading session enjoyable and meaningful. She is also a monitor who checks her child's reactions to see if he is bored or excited with the reading selection. If boredom exists, then the parent must end the session, change the book, or make the reading more exciting. The parent is also an informer who answers her child's questions and helps her child find the answers to his questions. Parents also act as interpreters and trackers. They attempt to help their children decipher difficult words or ideas, and they observe their child's progress.

Parents need to be involved in the reading process for many reasons. First, parents give children access to reading materials, such as books, magazines, and comic strips. Second, they actively participate in a variety of reading and writing activities. Thirdly, children love to read in an environment where they are comfortable. Cuddling up with a good book and one or both parents can be very comforting to a young child. Lastly, parents provide an inviting home environment and a positive attitude toward reading. These two ideas are crucial for literacy development and affect the way a child learns. Cramer and Castle (1994) argue:

> Children's interest and attitudes are affected by two major factors: first, the climate in the home, which surrounds the child from birth and carries explicit and implicit messages about the value of reading; and second, the child's own competence in reading. Thus, research about children's reading achievement is intertwined with information about parental roles in the development of

> children's interest in reading. Some environmental factors can be altered, such as availability of reading materials in the home, frequency of home literacy events, and, more difficult to change, the nature of parent-child literacy interactions and parents' attitudes toward their roles in their children's literacy development. (p. 74)

The only way to increase parent-child literacy interactions is to make the parents aware of how significant they are in the intellectual development of their children. Understanding this may also promote positive change in parents' attitudes toward their role in their child's learning.

Parental Attitude and Influence

The attitudes of parents, peers, and community members influence the way children react. "The development of literacy, then, is a profoundly social process, embedded in social relationships, particularly in children's relationships with parents, siblings, grandparents, friends, caretakers, and teachers. These people serve as models, provide materials, establish expectations, and offer help, instruction, and encouragement" (McLane & McNamee, 1990, p. 7). If a child's caretaker demonstrates a positive and enthusiastic attitude toward reading, then the child will most likely learn to love reading as well. This is the attitude that parents need to foster in their children if they want to raise a reader.

Thus, it follows that parental involvement plays a large part in early literacy development. From birth, children respond to the language and actions of their parents. If

reading is part of a parent's daily activities with their child, the child will learn that reading is a very important aspect of their lives. In a "Position paper on family literacy in Alberta" (1995), the author states that, "Parents are their children's first teachers. The home environment plays a critical role in a child's emerging literacy and attitudes towards learning. As well, the time parents and children spend reading together can contribute a positive experience to their relationship" (p. 1).

Parents are the closest relationship that a young child has. Children trust and love their parents unconditionally and will respond to what their parents do more so than any other person in their lives. Parents can use this close relationship to foster a positive environment for reading. Research shows that early readers are not necessarily more intelligent than other children, "but they all come from home environments that support reading" (Kropp, 1993, p. 65).

Cramer and Castle (1994) state that "reviews of research, studies of early readers, and investigations of emergent literacy uniformly conclude that parents' beliefs, aspirations, and actions affect their children's literacy growth" (p. 74). Parents want their children to succeed and most parents want their children to see the value of reading and education. Yet, if parents want to raise successful readers, they need to model self-esteem. Hunt (1978) comments that "the spotlight settles on individual parents. Parents need basic self-esteem, for they set the pattern. Our influence flows out of ourselves, our values, our priorities, and our basic understanding of the meaning of life" (p. 105). A parent's self-confidence will greatly encourage and influence her child's self-confidence.

Parents need to be convinced that they are their child's first teacher and that they do have an impact on their child's learning and literacy development. If parents have confidence in themselves, they will be able to help build self-confidence in their children. "Whether, how soon, how easily, and how well the child will be able to read will depend some measure on his native endowment and to a considerable degree on his home background. This includes how well his ability to understand...has been developed; whether reading has been impressed upon him as something desirable; and how much confidence in his intelligence and academic abilities has been instilled in him" (Bettelheim & Zelan, 1981, p. 5).

Parents need to be willing to spend their time, their resources and their energy in nurturing their child's growth in literacy. Children also need to observe their parents actively participating in literacy activities. "Parents unconsciously teach their children what is valuable by the way they spend their own time" (Hunt, 1978, p. 24). Reading to a child is incredibly influential to the child's development. Larrick (1959) elaborates on the idea of parental influence when he states:

> Every time you read aloud to the child, every time you introduce new storybook friends, every time you pay a visit to the library or read books of your own, you are exerting an influence on your child's reading. If he sees by your actions that you are interested in reading, he realizes this is a pleasure to strive for. And in this receptive state of mind he learns more easily and quickly at school . . . your child's response to reading will depend in large measure on your attitude and

> guidance. Consciously or unconsciously, you have influenced his reading from the time he heard, "This little pig went to market." By the time he enters first grade, he has had six years of education under you. (p. 2)

What Can Parents Do?

Learning to read takes teamwork between parents and teachers. Parents need to be actively participating in the reading process. Yet, this does not mean that parents should focus on the structure of reading. Parents tend to become overachievers in the literacy process and they want to teach their children rules for reading. Unfortunately, this typically can have an adverse affect on the way children perceive reading activities with their parents. "Moms and dads have a much more important job to do: establish positive learning conditions at home, be loving, knowledgeable learning facilitators, and help your child be a better reader" (Wiener, 1990, p. 191). Larrick (1959) explains to parents:

> As a child reads, he is growing and developing as a person. His horizons broaden, and he expands accordingly. He begins to establish his pattern of values. His respect for other people is taking shape. His own satisfaction is making him a more secure person. And by his questions and comparisons he is becoming a more creative thinker. Your influence in this unfolding process is tremendous, probably much greater than the teacher's. For you are with the child year in and year out, and your thinking permeates his way of doing things. The guidance you give him in reading will be much more effective if it is in harmony with the guidance the teacher is giving at school. (p. 27)

Therefore, the teacher provides the guidelines and the rules of reading, and the parents provide a pleasurable home environment conducive to reading enjoyment. Family reading time needs to be fun, creative, and interactive. A successful home environment includes activities that "often appear casual and playful, and they are as likely to be initiated by the children as by the adults" (McLane & McNamee, 1990, p. 95).

For most parents, "the issue is not whether to participate in the reading development of their children, but how to best pass this important gift on to them" (Clinard, 1981, p. vii). There are many practical, fun, and exciting things that parents can do at home to encourage their child to read. The first and foremost idea is providing a print-rich environment. "The most obvious step is to provide access to books. It is certainly true that 'you can lead a horse to water but you cannot make him drink.' But first we must make sure the water is there" (Krashen, 1993, p. 33).

The next step, and most important activity, is reading aloud to a child. Research shows that reading aloud has multiple effects on literacy development. Hearing and discussing stories encourages reading. Certain studies have shown that children who are read to regularly make greater gains in reading comprehension and vocabulary development (Cohen, 1968; Feitelson, Kita, & Goldstein, 1986). As previously mentioned, some parents may feel that their child is either too young or too old to have stories read aloud to them. This is not the case. It is never too early to start reading to a child and even adults love to hear stories read aloud. The U. S. Department of Education states:

> Children learn to love the sound of language before they ever notice the existence of printed words on a page. They coo or babble when you talk or sing to them, and as they grow, rapidly pick up the concepts and words they hear used. Reading aloud with children is an essential component to language development and is one of the most important activities for preparing them to succeed as readers. (p. 1)

Not only do the children enjoy hearing the stories, but often parents admit that they enjoy time spent reading with their child. Storytime can be a mutually beneficial time for both parents and children. Also, "it is the one early experience that has been identified as making a difference in later success in learning to read in school" (McLane & McNamee, 1990, p. 67).

Research shows that children who are read to at home tend to read more on their own (Lomax, 1976; Neuman, 1986). How long should parents continue reading aloud to their children? Lindskoog and Lindskoog (1978) answer:

> Long after the children can read well to themselves. Children enjoy hearing stories that are far beyond their reading level. They need that stretching. The parent has the double pleasure of sharing old favorites and making new discoveries with a maturing child. For many children, there are few times more cozy and secure than when parents are reading to them. The physical closeness and the sound of that attentive voice continue to nurture us, even in our memories. And what parent doesn't cherish this same sharing? (p. 27)

When reading to a child, there are many things to remember. It is important that the parent has the child's complete attention. If the child is too sleepy or is playing with a toy, the reading time will not be effective. The parent must never force a child to read if he is disinterested. Next, the parent and/or the child should find an appropriate book. It is imperative that the book be one in which the child is interested. Find an appropriate location for reading. The setting should be comfortable and isolated from any other distractions. Parents should ensure that the child is able to see both the pictures and the print. Bettelheim and Zelan (1981) point out an interesting illustration of how some children have learned to read books upside down:

> They did this as they watched an older sibling read from the opposite side of the table, or from across a desk. The younger child would point out words asking what they meant, and be answered without the book being turned around for him, so that he first learned to recognize words upside down. When these children entered school, it was difficult initially for them to read words right side up; but, given their interest in reading, they were soon able to do so. (p. 9)

The parents should also actively involve the child in the reading. Making reading a partnership between parents and children is very important. Parents should encourage children to point and touch the book. Discussing the book, directing the child's attention to something interesting, and relating the book to the child's experiences builds the child's desire to read more. Children need to be active participants during storytime. Butler (1980) illustrates it this way:

> Reading aloud is a performance. And to this performance, as to any other, you can bring spirit and individuality. Don't hesitate to move in time to the rhythm, to accentuate rhymes, to tickle or cuddle the baby at appropriate points (which he will come to anticipate), to turn over the page with a flourish...in short, to perform with style. Your reward will come with your baby's response. You'll be astonished at how early he gives sign of knowing that, any minute now, the image will change. As your hand moves towards the top right-hand corner of the page, the baby's eyes will brighten. A flick - and a totally new vista is presented for his delight. You are staying in touch with him in the best possible way, if you can share his pleasure. (p. 17)

Parents need to talk about reading books as something they will be doing together with the child, even if the child is not yet reading. Saying, "When *we* read this book, *we'll* learn more about dinosaurs" lets the child know that he will be an active participant. Also, parents ought to be honest if they do not know an answer to a child's question. They should encourage the child to look up the answer in another book, or look up an unknown word in the dictionary. "Families can grow together by discovering the fun of words. Happy is the home that has one parent at least who says, 'Let's look it up!' and helps children to see that a dictionary is a fascinating friend" (Hunt, 1978, p. 33).

There are a multitude of other ideas that parents can do with their children. Some of these ideas include talking with their children about school or everyday events, supervising homework, and providing rich learning experiences outside of home and

school (such as museums, libraries, zoos, concerts, etc.). "Parents who take children on walks, visits, and field outings are building the child's experiential base which, as we have seen, plays an extensive role in reading achievement" (Stoodt, 1981, p. 39). Also, parents should surround their children with a variety of authentic literature, and let the children participate in or actively listen and watch daily activities that the parents do around the house and in the community. A child can help a parent write out a shopping list. Parents can listen to nursery rhymes, children songs, or children's books on tape in the car with their children. Also, buying books with their children is important. This allows a child to see that the parent values books as much as groceries or household supplies, and also allows the child to take pride in books he can call his own. "A research program in England recently established that children who come from families where books are *owned* are the best readers of all" (Butler, 1980, p. 120).

Another literacy activity parents can do with their children is playing games. Children especially love word games. Parents can have their children think of words that begin with the sound /c/, as in cat, or sound words, such as bang, splash, etc. "The sound of words gives special pleasure to children" (Larrick, 1959, p. 5). Literacy activities are all around. (See Appendix B)

The Value of Books

Books are amazing tools in the literacy process. They are valuable for many reasons. They can take children to places that they may never have the chance to see, such as Laos, Greece, or the pyramids in Egypt. They introduce children to heroes and

inspirational people, such as Martin Luther King, Jr. Books entertain, build the imagination, and stretch children's minds. Books also give children a sense of security. "Children meet others whose backgrounds, religions, and cultural ways are unlike their own. They come to accept the feeling of being different, and fear, which is the result of not understanding, is removed" (Hunt, 1978, p. 19).

Books have a life of their own. Hunt (1978) states that "A good book is a magic gateway into a wider world of wonder, beauty, delight and adventure. Books are experiences that make us grow, that add something to our inner stature" (p. 14). Therefore, parents and teachers need to introduce children to good books.

However, one might wonder what constitutes a good book? C.S. Lewis (in Hunt, 1978) explains that "no book is really worth reading at the age of ten which is not equally worth reading at the age of fifty. Children's books cannot be written down to children. They reject books which do not treat them as equals" (p. 39). Children are wonderful and imaginative creatures. They love having fun and are eager to learn. Parents should encourage their child's eagerness by providing a plethora of rich and interesting literature for him to absorb. Hunt (1978) states:

> There is one overriding requirement, however, if books are to work for children this way. They have to be successful books, books that will make a child sit up and take notice, laugh, and ask "Why?" Books that will involve him deeply and lift him out of the here-and-now to a place of wonder. "Read it again" will always be the highest accolade. Such books exist. (p. 178)

Age Appropriate Books

A multitude of books are available for children of all ages. (See Appendix D for book lists.) Parents should be aware of the types of books that are most suitable for their children at different ages. Young infants and toddlers love board books, chubby books, and books with lots of pictures but few words. Most of these books will have ten or fewer pages. Young toddlers can also enjoy books with paper pages.

Stories at this age will have animals, machines, trains, nature, weather, etc. Babies also love nursery rhymes and songs. Some parents may feel that nursery rhymes are too outdated or meaningless for today's children. However, research suggests otherwise. Butler (1980) argues:

> An element of lunacy has always been cherished by children, and words that are not completely rational, but that offer an experience to the senses rather than the mind, help them towards a feeling for language itself, in all its diverse trappings. We are surely hoping to raise imaginative children, children who tap all the available resources, without and within. At all events, overseriousness has no place in childhood . . . make sure that both you and your child emerge from the years of babyhood with all the old rhymes tucked safely away, as familiar as diapers and teddy bears, and just as essential. You will both be well armed for the years ahead. (p. 27)

Parents should not choose books just for the beautiful illustrations. Simply because a book has striking pictures, does not denote that it is meaningful to the child.

The story should offer enjoyment as well. "Make no mistake about this. An adult may open a picture book at random and be so carried away by the quality of its illustrations that they must borrow or buy it; but it is the story that will captivate the child or leave him cold" (Butler, 1980, p. 67).

As a child enters school, parents should continue to read aloud to him every day. Early school-age children love stories about animals, funny stories, adventure, fantasy, and stories about real things. The use of comic books at this age is very appropriate and can have a very positive effect. Children learn an abundance of vocabulary words simply by reading comics. "One comic a week would mean about 100,000 words per year" (Krashen, 1993, p. 51). Furthermore, comic books are relatively easy to read and have a high-interest level. Most importantly, they keep kids reading.

Parents also need to encourage older children to keep reading. Even though these children have already learned to read, they should still be reading to their parents and parents should still be reading aloud to them. At this age, children love chapter books. Parents can read the first chapter or two to help build interest in a book that the child may not have picked up on his own.

Children at this age should be forming a habit of reading. Parents can encourage this by presenting children with series books. These books hook the child into a variety of characters that they come to know. They will want to continue learning more about their adventures, which will lead to future reading. Hunt (1978), quoting Ruth Sawyer, writes that older children should read a variety of stories:

> Stories that make for wonder. Stories that make for laughter. Stories that stir one within with an understanding of the true nature of courage, of love, of beauty. Stories that make one tingle with high adventure, with daring, with grim determination, with the capacity of seeing danger through to the end. Stories that bring our minds to kneel in reverence; stories that show the tenderness of true mercy, the strength of loyalty, the unmawkish respect for what is good. (p. 26)

Second Language Learners and Literacy

What about homes in which the primary language is not English? How can these parents help their children read? The most important thing for parents to understand is that reading aloud is crucial. Children learn so much from hearing a parent read to them. They learn that print has meaning and that letters make sounds. They learn to respond to stories even better if it is read in their first language. Parents must be encouraged to discuss stories with their children to enhance comprehension. Bernice E. Cullinan (1992) states that "no matter what the language, we *must* read to our children" (p. 13).

Secondly, parents can get assistance from teachers, tutors, or older siblings in helping their children learn to read. Children learn in a second language more rapidly when they have confidence in their primary language first. Also, the child's comprehension will be enhanced by hearing the story in the language he knows. Literacy transference occurs more rapidly when the child has a basic understanding of reading and writing in his primary language. Therefore, it is beneficial for parents to encourage their child to learn in their first language.

The Media and Technology Issue

Reading is one of the most valuable aspects of literacy development. Therefore, is media or technology a deterrent? The issues involving media, especially television, are a commonly discussed dilemma. Are television programs or videos beneficial, or are they going to be detrimental to a child's learning? TV can be beneficial but it must be monitored. Parents need to pay close attention to what their children are viewing. There are various programs and educational videos that are structured for children and help them to learn, such as Sesame Street and Arthur videos. Despite the possible educational value, television should be used in moderation. Kropp (1993) states, "Put a reasonable limit on television, video, and video games so there will be time for reading in your child's life" (p. 5). Clinard (1981) goes on to state:

> We will continue wondering how positively or negatively our children have been influenced by television unless we (1) are selective in what our children are to watch, (2) watch television as much as we can with our children to know what they are seeing and hearing, (3) talk about the programs with our children, and (4) encourage our children to tell us (or watch for signals that show us) what they learned. (p. 27)

Television and movies can have a positive and a negative influence on literature. They can get children excited about reading, especially if they see stories dramatized in programs on television and in movies. Children tend to read books about characters they see animated on screen, such as James and the Giant Peach or even chapter books about

Pokemon. Yet, television can have an adverse affect as well. "It can kill personal creativity. We don't even have to wonder what the characters look like. And while a good actor can portray intense emotion, it brings to the viewer a different experience than words do. And it cheats us of the opportunity to learn how to express what we feel in words" (Hunt, 1978, p. 41).

So what should parents do in regards to television? Parents need to set limits on the amount of time spent in front of the TV. Parents can institute a family night in which the TV is turned off one night a week for the entire family. Parents should find programs and videos designed with children in mind that are educational and fun. Discuss characters or events that are involved in the programs. Parents can even use the television to initiate family literacy activities, such as writing their own commercials. Most importantly, parents should encourage children to find leisure time activities other than the media, especially reading a good book.

What about technology? Computers are becoming a major source of enjoyment for children in this technological age. Yet, computers are as educational as they are fun. This form of media has become a wonderful academic tool for children. There are multitudes of computer programs that enhance literacy skills. Children are learning computer skills at a very young age due to more computers becoming available in homes and schools.

The Internet is also a valuable asset in a child's literacy development. There is a whole world available to children right at their fingertips. The Internet is a type of

modern-day encyclopedia. Any question a child may have can probably be answered via the Internet. However, parents must still monitor what Internet sites their children explore. The most important aspect is that youngsters will be more excited to learn how to read if it means they will be able to explore the World Wide Web.

A Christian Perspective

Children and books go together in a unique way. In the same way, parents and children are bonded in a special way. Christian parents should be concerned about training their children emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. God has instructed parents in Proverbs 22:6 to "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (NIV, 1985, p. 976). This instruction involves training children in the wisdom of God's Word. Yet, it embraces so much more. Hunt (1978) states that this verse also means "to train the child's character, to give him high ideals, and to encourage integrity. It is to provide largeness of thought, creative thinking, imaginative wondering - an adequate view of God and His world . . . we have books and the Book at our disposal to use wisely for God's glory" (p. 21).

Christian parents are obligated to train a child using the words of the gospel. The Bible should be an integral part of storytime in a Christian household. Christian parents ought to be reading Bible stories to their children and actively participating in family devotions. Parents are models of literacy for their children. Literacy skills should be demonstrated in all areas of life. This includes daily activities, such as reading the mail and writing out a recipe. Yet, more importantly, Christian parents ought to be modeling

literacy using the most important tool: God's Word. If children observe their parents reading the Word, they will most likely want to read the Bible on their own. Church should not be the only place a child witnesses others reading the Bible. Hunt (1978) explains:

> Parents who never read God's Word outside of an organized meeting of the church are not likely to sense the urgency of instructing children in the most important truth in the world. If we really believe that knowing God and His Son is the most vital experience in the world, how dare we leave the responsibility for instruction to someone else? (p. 91)

God shows us in His Word that He sees parents as valuable teachers for their children. He instructs parents to educate their children in the Word. Deuteronomy 11:18-19 says, "Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (NIV, 1985, p. 260). Literacy includes language (listening and speaking), as well as reading and writing. What better way to increase language skills than to speak God's Word wherever you go. God has blessed humans with the beauty of language. Proverbs 25:11 says, "A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver" (NIV, 1985, p. 981). He also instructs children to obey their parents and to listen to their parents' instructions. Proverbs 1:8-9 states, "Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching. They will be a garland to grace your head and

a chain to adorn your neck" (NIV, 1985, p. 946). Therefore, using God's Word as a learning tool includes all four areas of literacy.

Yet, the Bible is not the only literary source for Christian parents. God gave humans a creative nature. This creative nature has been used by many to write wonderful books about the incredible world that God has created. Parents should provide a variety of literary experiences for their children. Hunt (1978) comments:

> Any good book can be used by God in a child's development, for a good book has genuine spiritual substance, not just intellectual enjoyment. Books help children know what to look for in life. It is like developing the taste buds of his mind as a child learns to savor what he sees, hears, and experiences. (p. 18)

Therefore, parents should offer secular as well as Christian books to their children. More importantly, parents should select books based upon the quality of the text. If the story is Biblically based, yet has no substance, then what good is that book for the child? Many secular books teach morals and ethics that parents want their children to know. Also, books teach children about the things around them and bring the world alive.

Parents may wish to monitor what their children read, but limiting their choices may also narrow their chances of experiencing the wonderful literature that is available. Christian books are valuable, but children need to be exposed to rich, quality literature, whether secular or Christian. "Quality has high priority . . . Generally, it is better to acquaint your child with a book of quality than with second-rate writing where the plot is only a thin disguise for dumping the Christian message" (Hunt, 1978, p. 30).

Parenting is a holy calling. Psalm 127:3 says, "Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him" (NIV, 1985, p. 925). Parenting involves loving, nurturing, training, disciplining, and teaching. Literacy is a necessary component in the area of teaching. Without literacy skills, children will be unable to read God's Word. Parents need to impart the gift of literacy to their children, and there is no better book to begin with than God's Book. By listening to God's Word being read to them, children will not only gain a better understanding of who God is, but they will also gain a closer relationship with their parents. This bond of love is what unites children with their parents and starts children on their way to success in literacy.

Conclusion

Benjamin Franklin was once asked, "What human condition deserves the most pity?" His answer was, "A lonesome man on a rainy day who does not know how to read." As we have seen throughout this thesis, learning to read and write begins at an early age and involves parents as well as the children. Parents are the most significant people that exist in a child's life. Parents are the first and most important teacher their children will ever have. The home is the single most significant reading environment. There are many children in the world that are failing in reading, so it is imperative that parents expose children to quality literature at an early age.

Early literacy development does not just "happen." Children begin to learn literacy skills through social processes. Therefore, parents need to be involved in the beginning stages of reading, as well as throughout their child's life. Early experiences with literacy

are found in a child's daily interactions with parents and siblings. McLane and McNamee (1990) explain:

> To these relationships and activities, children bring their curiosity, their interest in communication and interacting with others, and their inclination to be a part of family and community life . . . it is both what children and what other people bring to these interactions that shapes what children learn and how they come to see the eventual place of literacy in their own lives. (p. 143)

A child's attitude toward literacy is affected by the way reading and writing have been presented to him, as well as the attitudes of his parents. Reading and writing need to be meaningful parts of a child's upbringing. Parents must communicate to their children that they are capable and intelligent. Literacy ought to become a part of everyday interactions in a child's home. All these things are integral to a child's literacy development. The more enthusiastic parents are, the more eager their children will be to read. Hunt (1978) states, "You will determine your child's attitude toward the Book and books by the paths you open up for him. And it will affect your children's children . . . in the years to come" (p. 101).

Clinard (1981) beautifully comments that "reading is a gift passed on from one generation to the next. It is a gift that is basic to the progress of man and essential in the modern world to enjoy a full life" (p. vii). Our children are our legacy. If parents want to leave behind a legacy of success, they need to plant the literacy seed at an early age, water it, nourish it, and help it to grow. The fruit of the literacy seed produces children who will

become our leaders of tomorrow. Children who have been nurtured by parents and teachers and taught the benefits of literacy can become anything they desire. These successful children may become our future government leaders, brain surgeons, and missionaries or pastors that carry God's Word to the ends of the earth. The literacy cycle then continues on to their children.

Charles Swindoll once said, "There is no more influential or powerful role on earth than a mother's. As significant as political, military, educational or religious figures may be, none can compare to the impact made by mothers. Their *words* are never fully forgotten, their *touch* leaves an indelible impression, and the *memory* of their presence lasts a lifetime." *Both* parents are valuable assets for their children's learning and development. This thesis has shown evidence that it is never too early to start the wonderful process of literacy, and that the best place to begin is the home.

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APPENDIX A

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

There are many things parents can do at home with their children on a daily basis. Several activities are listed below. These activities are useful for young and older children alike.

- **Discuss** school and daily activities with your child.
- **Read** with your child every day. **Have them read** to you or alone. **Discuss** what they have read.
- **Monitor** the amount of time your child spends in front of the television. **Talk** about the programs they are watching.
- Show **love** and **support**, and **communicate** to your children that school is valuable and important.
- **Oversee** homework and **give help** where needed.
- **Provide** opportunities for experiences outside of home and school, such as parks, libraries, museums, etc.
- **Encourage** your children to write every day. Some examples may be letters, stories, poems, signs, etc.

Age Appropriate Activities for Reading

Infants

*Rhymes - It is never too early to begin reading to your child. Long before children can walk or talk, they will listen attentively to a parents' voice reading a nursery rhyme or reciting finger plays, such as "Pat-a-cake." Bounce your young children on your lap to the rhythm of "The Wheels on the Bus," or wiggle their toes to "This Little Pig Went to Market." All these things will help your young child begin to find enjoyment in poetry.

Toddlers

*Reading begins with pictures. Use picture books with little or no text involved. Turn the pages slowly with your child. Take time to laugh, point, or say a word or two in response to the pictures and the print. The key word for toddlers is enjoyment! As your toddler grows, you may move on to simple picture books with simple text.

Young Children

*Stories for young children should be of all kinds: folktales, funny stories, exciting tales and stories about everyday things. Repetition of action or words in a story is a big plus in books for small children. Since the attention span is longer now, try encouraging your child to hear a story to the very end. Do not question your child too much during the story. But if you must, then ask your child questions such as "What did the characters in the story do?" rather than asking your child what he/she learned from the story. That type of questioning will come later on. Still read picture books to your young child, but also start trying to read the classics with them as well.

Adolescents

*Supply reading materials that touch upon the youngster's special needs and interests, such as relationships, careers, summer jobs, music, and cars.

APPENDIX B

Literacy Activities at Home

1. Read, Read, Read!!

*Read pattern, rhyming, predictable, or alliterative books that have repetitive parts. Say the pattern part with your child each time it comes up.

2. Books on Tape

*Listen to pattern books on tape or CD and see if you and your child can say the pattern together. (Ex. books are Brown Bear, Brown Bear or Millions of Cats.)

3. Alphabet Search

*Find things that begin with different letters of the alphabet in your house or in magazines. Glue or draw the items on a paper that has that letter of the alphabet at the top. You could have a letter of the day and do this activity to match the letter you are working on.

4. ABC Books

*Staple 26 pages together to make an ABC book. Help your child label the top of every page with the letters of the alphabet (upper and lower case). If your child likes to collect stickers, they can collect them in this book by placing the stickers on the page with the corresponding first letter of the item on the sticker. You can make ABC books about themes, such as animals, insects, places to go, etc.

5. Memory Game

*Make upper and lower case alphabet flashcards. Turn all the cards upside down on the table. Each person takes a turn flipping two cards over. The object is to match upper and lower case letters. If the cards match, you keep the pair and get another try. If they don't, then the cards are turned back over and the other person takes a turn. The player with the most pairs at the end of the game is the winner.

6. Alphabet Bingo

*You can make your own bingo cards and your own made-up grid, or you can purchase the game at any Teacher's Supply store. It would be fun to make the game with your child, and practice saying the letters as you create the game.

7. "Let's Label the House!"

*Make labels using 3"x5" cards. Write a different letter of the alphabet on each card. Have your child draw a letter out of a bag and then find something in the house that begins with that letter. When they find something, tape the letter to the item. You can also do this activity with the letter of the day and find items around the house that begin with that letter.

8. Boggle

*You've heard of the game in the store, but you can make your own game at home using the letters that your child has already learned. Every time your child learns a new letter (including the sound of the letter), you can add that letter to your game. You can make the dice with consonants on some and vowels on others. (1 inch wood cubes work well for the dice.) Roll the dice and try to make words with the letters that are showing on the dice. This can be a timed game or just for fun. Give your child extra points for longer words.

9. Picture/Word Flashcards

*Have your child cut pictures out of magazines and glue them to flashcards. On the back of each flashcard, have your child sound out and write the matching word for that picture (with your help). Review the flashcards regularly and add more as time goes on.

10. "Label the House #2"

*This activity is similar to #7. Use the flashcards that are made from activity #9 and place them next to the actual items in your house (if you have those items in your house, of course). Have the child place the flashcard so that the word is showing and not the picture. This will reinforce the visual correspondence to the word each time your child looks at that item.

11. Family Win, Lose, or Draw

*This is much like the actual game. You may use vocabulary words that your child is trying to learn in school, or you may use the flashcards that were made in activity #9. The whole family can join in this game. Make two teams. One person from a team looks at a vocabulary word and draws it. The members of his team try to guess what the picture is. Then the teams switch. The team with the most correct guesses wins.

12. Word Searches

*Make word searches for your child. You can use any kind of grid with small squares. Use the words they are learning for vocabulary or spelling in school, or words that you have been discussing at home or in the car. Give the word search to your child and have them find the words. Also, you can have your child make a word search and try to stump you.

13. Word Bingo

*This is just like alphabet bingo, but with words. Again, you can make your own or buy different levels of word bingo at a Teacher's Supply store.

14. Picture Walks

*When you are reading a book to or with your child, begin with a picture walk. This means that you discuss the cover of the book and have your child make predictions

about the story from the picture on the cover. Discuss the author and the illustrator and what they do. Then, before reading the story, go through the book simply looking at the pictures and discuss with your child what they see. Again, have your child make more predictions about the story. Then go back and read the story to or with your child, checking their predictions as you go along.

15. Shopping Lists

*There is no reason why your child can't make the shopping list with you. Start by writing out the list with them and sounding out the words as you are writing. This models writing for your child. When your child gets older, have them help you write the words by sounding them out together. Later, they can write the words themselves. When you get to the grocery store, have your child help you look for the items on the list (they can read them off to you as you go). Then your child can cross the items off for you.

16. Family Secret Pals/Mailbox Madness

*Have your family choose secret pals to write notes to, or simply have a mailbox in your home that each member of the family can put letters in. Each member is responsible for writing to their secret pal, or just writing to others in the family. Each person can check the mailbox to see if they have any mail, or you could have a family mail call each night after dinner. Each person needs to write a response letter as well. Young children can have their letters read to them and they can dictate their letters to their parents or simply draw pictures in response.

17. Scrambled Word Hunt

*Write a word or name on a card leaving space between each letter. (For example, B E N J A M I N). Show and discuss the word with your child. Cut between the letters and scramble the word. Have your child sound out the letters and rebuild the word. In addition, you can have them find smaller words within the word. (For example: JAM, IN, MINE, NINE...) Suggestions for other word scrambles: days of the week, months, number words, ordinals - first, second, third, holidays, etc.)

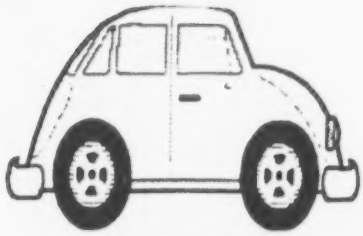
18. Sounds with Simon Says

*Use the alphabet flashcards from Activity #5. Have your child place the cards on the table in front of them. Play Simon Says with commands such as, "Simon says touch the letter g." "Simon says put the letter that makes the /c/ sound on your shoulder." "Put the /d/ and /n/ on your head." If you have more than one child, put the child that gets out next to you as a helper. He can tell the other child more commands.

19. Syllables Song

*Have your child do the "Head, shoulders, knees, and toes" motions to syllables. The child will touch each body part to different syllables in a word you say. For example, if you say the word "elephant" (3 syllables), your child would touch his head "el," his

shoulders "e," and his waist "phant." (Go in the order: head, shoulders, waist, knees, toes, and back. That way there are enough body parts for a multi-syllabic word.)



Literacy Activities in the Car

1. Sing along Songs

*Bring your child's favorite tapes or CD's in the car when you are going somewhere, even for short trips to the grocery store. Whenever you are in the car, you can sing songs, recite poems, or chant nursery rhymes.

2. Books on Tape

*Check out children's books on tape from the library or have your child bring their favorite stories on tape home from school and listen to them in the car. You can also record yourself reading your child's favorite book on a tape. Listening to their parent's voice on a tape will bring a child great pleasure.

3. Find the Alphabet

*Try to find the alphabet on signs, license plates, or billboards as you drive. You can take turns with your child in finding the letters, or you can make it a race to see who can find the letters first.

4. I Spy

*Say the poem, "I spy with my little eye, something that begins with _____." (Put a letter in the blank.) Your child needs to guess what you may be looking at. Then your child can try to fool you.

5. Storytelling

*Tell each other make-believe stories in the car. You can share in the storytelling or have your child make up the whole thing. Model a sample make-believe story for your child first. You can even make it challenging for your child by giving them an item (ex: a table, a dog, a spaceship) and have them make up a story about the item you choose. To extend this activity, when you go home, you and your child can illustrate and write a simple text for the made-up story. Then the child can share it with the rest of the family.

6. Car Journal

*For long rides, have a journal for your child with pages labeled with different letters of the alphabet. As you drive, your child can draw, label, and even write a sentence about what he/she sees on the trip. They place what they see on the page with the corresponding letter.

7. Store Hunt

*Laminate a grid with store or restaurant icons or names on it (such as the Carl's Jr. star). As the child sees the store or restaurant on the trip, he/she can mark it off with a dry erase marker or lable the icon with the correct name of the place.

8. Letter, Sound, Clap

*As you are driving, your child tells you something that he sees out the window. The parent says the first letter of that item, then the sound that letter makes, and then claps (or taps the steering wheel) to the number of syllables that word has. Then the parent picks something he/she sees and the child does letter, sound, clap.

APPENDIX C

Encouraging Summer Reading

1. Read to your child

*Simply reading to your child for a few minutes every day increases the child's desire to read books on his own. Children will often read books during their own free time that were read to them by their parents.

2. Model reading - be a reader yourself

*When your child sees you reading, they often follow your example. Show your child that reading can be for pleasure as well as for information.

3. Go to the library

*The library is a wonderful place for children to see the wide variety of reading materials available to them. They will take pride in owning a library card and being able to check out any book they desire. Also, many libraries have a summer reading program for children that they will really enjoy.

4. Make books available to your child

*Find books that relate to your child's interests and abilities. They will be more encouraged to read if the books available to them are ones that interest them. Your local librarian or your child's teacher will be able to suggest books that are at your child's reading level.

5. Make reading fun

*Reading should be viewed as a fun activity for your child and not something that is forced upon them. Encourage your child to read for pleasure, even if just for 15 minutes a day. Soon your child will want to read for even longer periods of time by his own choice.

6. Read as a family

*Set aside time every once in a while where the family has the opportunity to share books with each other. If you allow your child to choose the reading material, it will make your family reading time even more enjoyable.

7. Encourage your child to join a summer reading program

*As mentioned before, the libraries often have a reading program for youngsters to join. Also, some schools offer summer reading programs that are fun and encourage children to increase their reading skills.

Factors That Influence Reading Interest

1. Age

Your child's age strongly determines what they will want or choose to read. Young children prefer nursery rhymes, repetitive books, and books with lots of color and fun pictures. Primary children will need books with more words and exciting stories. Six to nine year olds may choose to read stories that contain a moral. They also enjoy stories that deal with emotions, relationships, behaviors, animals, nature, etc.

2. Sex

While it is commonly known that boys and girls tend to have very different likes and dislikes when it comes to book topics, this is not always the case. You need to allow for those differences, but also allow your child freedom of choice. Children need to be allowed to read books that are geared toward their own interests, no matter what those interests may be.

3. Grade Level

Make sure that you do not base your child's books on their school grade level. These levels are used for instructional purposes, not for leisurely reading. Make sure a wide variety of leveled books are available for your child. A third grade child may be reading at a fifth grade level. Allow your children to stretch beyond their level, but also enjoy the pleasure of simple picture books as well.

4. Exposure to Books

As stated above, a wide variety of books being available to your child is very important. The more your child is being exposed to reading activities that they enjoy, the more they are going to want to learn to read. Read books to your children, allow them to look at and read books at home, and show your children how to take pride in treating books with care.

5. Availability of Printed Materials

If your child is unable to find anything to read, your child will obviously not be reading. Have all sorts of reading materials available in your home, including hardback and paperback books, magazines, newspapers, TV guides, comic strips, cookbooks, etc. Make a special reading corner in your home for your child to relax and read a good book.

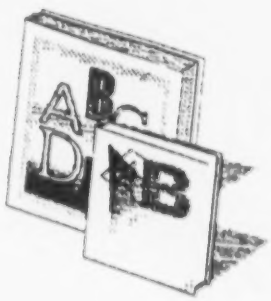
6. Reward

Praising your child's reading will give him a greater self-esteem. This will encourage him to read more.

Word Endings

****Would you believe you can help your children make nearly 500 words using the following word endings?**

1. -ack
2. -ank
3. -eat
4. -ill
5. -ock
6. -ump
7. -all
8. -ap
9. -ell
10. -in
11. -oke
12. -unk
13. -ain
14. -ash
15. -est
16. -ine
17. -op
18. -ake
19. -ug
20. -at
21. -ice
22. -ing
23. -ore
24. -ale
25. -ate
26. -ick
27. -ink
28. -or
29. -ame
30. -aw
31. -ide
32. -ip
33. -uck
34. -an
35. -ay
36. -ight
37. -ir

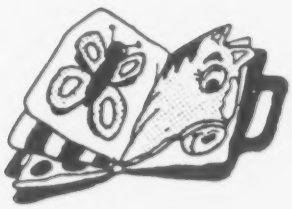


♥♥♥

APPENDIX D

Recommended Books

Alliterations



A My Name Is Alice by Jane Bayer (Dial)

ABC of Monsters by Deborah Niland (McGraw)

Alfred's Alphabet Walk by Victoria Chess (Greenwillow)

Alligators All Around by Maurice Sendak (HarperCollins)

Alpha Beta Chowder by Jeanne and William Steig (HarperCollins)

Animalia by Graeme Base (Abrams)

Aster Aardvark's Alphabet Adventures by Steven Kellogg (Morrow)

Faint Frogs Feeling Feverish by Lilian Obligado (Viking)

Have You Ever Seen...? by Beau Gardner (Dodd)

Six Sick Sheep: 101 Tongue Twisters by Joanna Cole (Morrow)

Rhymes

Across the Stream by Mirra Ginsburg (Greenwillow)

Animal Homes by Brian Wildsmith (Oxford)

The Annotated Mother Goose: Nursery Rhymes Old and New by William and Ceil Baring-Gould (Potter)

At the Crack of the Bat by Lillian Morrison (Hyperion)

Bears by Ruth Krauss (Harper)

Bears in Pairs by Niki Yektai (Bradbury)

Carrot Parrot by Jerome Martin (Simon & Schuster)

Drummer Hoff by Barbara Emberley (S&S Trade)

Each Peach Pear Plum by Janet and Allan Ahlberg (Viking)

Father Fox's Pennyrhymes by Clyde Watson (Scholastic)

The Foot Book by Dr. Seuss (Random House)

Goodnight Moon by Margaret Wise Brown (Harper)

Have You Seen Birds? by Joanne Oppenheim (Scholastic)

Hide and Snake by Keith Baker (Harcourt)

Hop on Pop by Dr. Seuss (Random House)

Horton Hears a Who! by Dr. Seuss (Random House)

A House is a House for Me by Mary Ann Hoberman (Viking)

Hunches in Bunches by Dr. Seuss (Random House)

The Hungry Thing by Jan Slepian and Ann Seidler (Scholastic)

I Can Read with My Eyes Shut by Dr. Seuss (Random House)

I Was Walking Down the Road by Sarah Barchas (Scholastic)

I Wish That I Had Duck Feet by Theo LeSieg (Random House)

Is Your Mama a Llama? by Deborah Guarino (Scholastic)

Jamberry by Bruce Degen (Harper)

The Lady with the Alligator Purse by Nadine Westcott (Little, Brown)

More Spaghetti, I Say! by Rita Gelman (Scholastic)

On Beyond Zebra! by Dr. Seuss (Random House)

Pickles Have Pimples and Other Silly Statements by Judi Barrett (Atheneum)

Red Dragonfly on My Shoulder by Sylvia Cassedy and Kunihiro Suetake (HarperCollins)

Sheep in a Jeep by Nancy Shaw (Houghton Mifflin)

Strawberry Drums by Adrian Mitchell (Delacorte)

Street Rhymes Around the World by Jane Yolen (Wordsong)

There's a Wocket in My Pocket by Dr. Seuss (Random House)

To the Moon and Back by Nancy Larrick (Delacorte)

Tomie dePaola's Mother Goose by Tomie dePaola (Putnam)

The Wind Blew by Pat Hutchins (Macmillan)

Songs and Chants

And the Green Grass Grew All Around: Folk Poetry from Everyone by Alvin Schwartz (HarperCollins)

Anna Banana: 101 Jump-Rope Rhymes by Joanna Cole (Morrow)

Arroz Con Leche: Popular Songs and Rhymes from Latin America by Lulu Delacre (Scholastic)

Baby Beluga by Raffi (Crown)

The Cat Who Loved to Sing by Nonny Hogrogian (Knopf)

Down By the Bay by Raffi (Crown)

Eency Weency Spider by S. Schindler (Bantam)

Frog Went A-Courting by Wendy Watson (Lothrop)

Hand Rhymes by Marc Brown (E.P. Dutton)

I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly by Nadine Westcott (Little, Brown)

In a Cabin in a Wood by Darcie McNally (E.P. Dutton)

Mary Wore Her Red Dress by Merle Peek (Clarion)

Millions of Cats by Wanda Gag (Coward, McCann & Geoghegan)

Miss Mary Mack by Joanna Cole (Morrow)

Oh, A-Hunting We Will Go by John Langstaff (Atheneum)

Peanut Butter and Jelly by Nadine Westcott (E.P. Dutton)

Roll Over by Merle Peek (Houghton Mifflin)

Shake My Sillies Out by Raffi (McKay)

Shimmy Shimmy Coke-Ca-Pop! by John and Carol Langstaff (Doubleday)

Singing Bee! A Collection of Favorite Children's Songs by Jane Hart (Lothrop)

There's a Hole in the Bucket by Nadine Westcott (HarperCollins)

Tingalayo by Raffi (Crown)

The Wheels on the Bus by Harriet Ziefert (Random House)

The Zebra-Riding Cowboy: Folk Songs from the Old West by Angela Medearis (Holt)

Traditional Stories

Briar Rose, the story of Sleeping Beauty by Margery Gill (Bodley Head)

Chanticleer and the Fox by Barbara Cooney (T. Y. Crowell)

Little Sister and the Month Brothers by Beatrice Schenk de Regniers (Seabury)

Noah's Ark by Peter Spier (Doubleday)

The Elves and the Shoemaker by Katrin Brandt (Bodley Head)

The Emporers New Clothes by Fulvio Testa (Abelard-Schuman)

The Fisherman and His Wife by Monika Laimgruber (Greenwillow)

The Fox Went Out on a Chilly Night by Peter Spier (Doubleday)

The Great Big Enormous Turnip by Helen Oxenbury (Watts)

The Hobyahs by Simon Stern (Prentice-Hall)

The Little Hen and the Giant by Maria Polushkin (Harper & Row)

The Magic Porridge Pot by Paul Galdone (Seabury)

The Princess and the Pea by Paul Galdone (Seabury)

Wolf! Wolf! by Elizabeth and Gerald Rose (Faber)

APPENDIX E

Unity

I dreamed I stood in a studio
And watched the scultpors there.
The clay they used was a young child's mind,
And fashioned it with care.
One was a teacher; the tools he used
Were books and music and art;
One was a parent with a guiding hand,
And a gentle loving heart.
Day after day the teacher toiled,
With touch that was deft and sure,
While the parent labored by his side,
And polished and smoothed it o'er.
And when at last their task was done,
They were proud of what they had wrought,
For the things they had molded into the child,
Could neither be sold or bought.
And each agreed he would have failed
If he had worked alone,
For behind the parent stood the school,
And behind the teacher, the home.
~Author Unknown